steps to contain expenditure and enhance earnings so as to improve the operational efficiency of the Railways and to generate internal resources for projects. Many steps have also been taken to enhance safety and security, including the setting up of a Special Railway Safety Fund for renewal and replacement of over-aged assets in a time-bound manner.

In order to provide enhanced security to passengers, a proposal for emending the RPF Act and Indian Railways Act for greater empowerment of the RPF, is under consideration.

(c) As a result of the measures being taken, the operating ratio of the Railways is likely to improve from 98.3% in 2000-01 to 94.4% in 2002-03 (BE). The Railways have also been able to improve the internal generation of resources from Rs. 3187 cr. in 2000-01 to Rs. 4248 cr. in 2002-03 (BE).

Security along rail tracks in Assam

4759. SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the State Governments are bound to provide security for rail tracks between outer to outer railway signals;

(b) whether, due to inability of the Assam Government to provide track security in 1996, the Railways had decided to have security patrolling by Railways' own force;

(c) if so, whether the Railways have recovered the dues from Assam Government to the full extent by adjustment/with-holding the payments due to General Reserve Police Force (GRPF), payable by the Railways to the State Government; and

(d) how much dues are still outstanding against the Assam Government, even after adjustment/with-hoding of the GRPF dues by the Railways?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) and (d) No, Sir. However, bills for an amount of Rs. 37.23 Crores for recovery of cost of Security Patrolling of track have been preferred on Government of Assam for realisation.

Purchase of sub-standard sleepers from Malaysia

4760. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that the Railways purchased sub-standard sleepers worth Rs. 20.3 crore, namely Balau-wooden specials, from Malaysia in 1990, from certain supplier, despite the reservations of Forest Research Institute, Dehradun;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof, including the names of firms and the quantity purchased from each and how much quantity is still lying unused with the Railways; and

(c) what action Government had taken against those firms which supplied inferior goods with the connivance of Rail Staff?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) No Sir. In response to a specific reference from Ministry of Railways, in Feb. 1986, Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun advised that Balau was described as very hard, heavy, strong and durable wood and superior to Indian Sal (Shorea Robusta) in all respects; and the wood being stronger than Indian Sal wood from strength point of view was suitable for Railway sleepers. Later in May, 1987 it also apprised Railways of certain inherent drawbacks of Balau wood such as, it was liable to splitting on drying and, checking, splitting and surface cracking during air seasoning under Malayasian conditions and it recommended procurement of a small quantity for trial purpose. As the FRI did not conduct any tests on the Balau timber itself and its advice was based on published literature, Indian Railways also obtained the first hand information from director, Civil Engineering, Ministry of Transport, Malayasian Railways (PKTM) who recommended use of Balau wood for Railway sleepers as (PKTM) had been using this wood on their system and based on recommendations of FRI and PKTM. Indian Railways decided to import a small quantity of 41,399 cum. of Balau wood for